

IX.—*Note on Zoological Nomenclature.* By B. H. HODGSON, Esq.

If I revert to the comments of your anonymous correspondent upon my *Cervus Elaphoides*, (No. 52 for April,) it is because I think that a question of some moment hangs upon the judgment pronounced in this case, viz. the right to designate species, and the consequence of doing so from very imperfect knowledge.

According to your correspondent's own shewing, CUVIER never procured more than the horns of this deer; and, so conscious was CUVIER, ultimately, of his inability to fix the species upon a just basis, that, in his last edition of the *Regne\**, all mention of it is omitted. Meanwhile, however, he gave it a name, upon retaining which your correspondent insists, although your correspondent, in the very same page, exhibits the following practical consequence of such proceedings.

The first writer of the age upon the tribe of animals to which our *Cervus* belongs (H. SMITH) is entirely *mised* by CUVIER's insufficient definition, or rather designation, and ascribes this deer to the *Rusa* group! Now, it is a well known fact, that, although the more skilful general writers upon zoology have, of late years, omitted half the recorded species from inability to verify them, yet that, amongst the species inserted, no careful student can satisfactorily refer to one in ten! Is this system to go on? and, if not, is there any cure for it but a general resolution to admit no names of species which the nomenclator has not, at the time, or *subsequently*, verified?

Your correspondent has only to turn to those recent and costly works upon Indian Zoology, GOULD's *Century* and HARDWICKE's *Illustrations*, and he will find that the multiplication of idle names and of fictitious species is still going on, under the auspices of persons who neither have, nor can have, competent means of at once undoing past errors and preventing future ones. Press or picture, it is the same thing. Neither ought to be devoted, in permanent style, to the propagation of delusion and inconvenience; nor any ad interim labours of any man recognised, (except such as he has ultimately himself completed), if their recognition have that effect, at the same time that it interferes with the just reward of the ripe and adequate labours of others. *Finis coronat opus*: and, though it may be reasonable to admit temporarily all names, as an index and stimulus to discovery, as well as to sustain eventual claims, if advanced, yet those names alone are entitled to permanence which the affixers, sooner or later, connect with indisputable species. CUVIER himself

\* A new and amended list of all authentic species is given in this edition.

abandoned his name, because he could not eventually so connect it: and I confess I do not perceive upon what sound principle your correspondent insists upon the revival and retention of that name.

I beg to acknowledge the courtesy of your own note appended to the communication in question, and to state my conviction that Dr VAUCEL most probably obtained the horns of the *Cervus Elaphoides* from me.

The observation of your correspondent—that the “suborbital depression on the skull of our deer is perforated by a very large oval hole, which is not found in the skull of the *Jarai*”—wants, I believe, confirmation. Such holes are very usually found in the skulls of both species; but, so far as my experience goes, they are not proper to the *perfect* skull of either\*. After considerable inquiry amongst my friends to the westward, I have determined to retain the name of *Bara Sinha* for the *Cervus Elaphus*; those of *Maha* and *Bahraiya* for *Cervus Elaphoides*; and that of *Jarai* for the only type of the *Rusa* group known to me. This animal is the *Cervus Jarai* of HODGSON, precisely *because* he has found it utterly impossible to fix the shifting and insufficient specific indications of H. SMITH—a difficulty, by the way, which your correspondent seems to share, if I may judge by his somewhat loose allusion to “*Cervus Hippelaphus and Aristotelis* or *Rusas*” (in the plural.) May I hope for his valuable assistance in my endeavours to decide, whether there be really *more than one* species of *Rusa* in the Bengal Presidency? and *which* of the *several* named by H. SMITH it or they be? Let me request your correspondent to test the above remarks on nomenclature by applying them to the very difficulty just cited. I am content to abide by the issue!

[We have to apologize for so long delaying the publication of Mr. HODGSON'S note, which has been lying in type at the printer's some months. We are very sure the correspondent to whom he appeals will assist in the desirable object of identifying and fixing Indian Species.—Ed.]

\* If they *were*, we should be in the way of ascertaining the probable or possible truth of that startling assertion, that breathing takes place through the suborbital sinus. I have examined repeatedly fresh heads of several species with a view to this assertion: and my conclusion is that it *cannot* be true, unless breath can pass through bone and skin too: for, in the perfect skull there is no solution of continuity in either substance, within the limits of this sinus. *Without* and *above* the sinus, there is something extremely like such a solution, in the skulls of *Elaphus*, *Ratwa*, *Jarai* and *Elaphoides*. But, even here, a *perfectly fresh* head will exhibit osseous or quasi osseous continuity; and the skin-fold is ever uninterruptedly carried through the sinus, though with much attenuation at the bottom of it.